

11. A NESTING COLONY OF SMALL SWALLOW-PLOVERS
IN MYSORE STATE

In the survey of birds of Mysore State conducted from November, 1939, to February, 1940, by Mr. Salim Ali and reported in this journal (Vol. 43, Nos. 2, 3 and 4; Vol. 44, Nos. 1 and 2), the Small Swallow Plover, *Glareola lactea* Temminck, was not encountered. However, Major E. G. Pythian-Adams contributed the information that the species, is 'Very local ' and that he took eggs (c/2) on an island in the Cauvery river below Talakad (Mysore Dist.) 10-4-1937. The following record of a nesting colony discovered in 1951 should therefore be added to the above scanty report.

On May 24, 1951, my sons, Michael and Douglas, and I were pursuing birds, butterflies and mosquito larvae respectively in the vicinity of Sakleshpur, Hassan District, Mysore State (elevation approximately 3,000 feet). One of our explorations took us to the banks of the Hemavati river about half a mile downstream (south) of the town. At this season of the year there had not yet been much rain and the water level was so low that it was possible to wade across the river at numerous places without encountering channels more than knee-deep. The river took a bend at this point and several gravel bars, built up by previous strong currents, were now left exposed. Some of these had no connection with land on either bank and thus formed small island sanctuaries.

On one such island we discovered a colony of nesting birds, such as we had not seen before. Careful written descriptions of them were later provisionally referred to the small swallow plover by Mr. Humayun Abdulali at the Bombay Natural History Society, while at a still later date when I visited the museum in Bombay I was able at first glance to pick out a skin of this species from a trayful of mixed bird specimens. Except for the fact that none of the Sakleshpur swallow plovers was collected for confirmation, there is apparently no reason to doubt the validity of the identification.

About 25 or 30 birds were present on this first occasion. They flew overhead with the behavioral antics of colonial nesting birds such as terns, doubling back and forth and continually diving at our heads. Being somewhat deaf I shall not attempt to describe their notes other than to say that they were not harsh like terns but of a more mellow plover-like timbre. Frequently one or several birds would alight nearby and squat on the coarse sand as if on a nest, spreading their wings as if sheltering young, or moving their bodies from side to side as if adjusting eggs beneath them. They managed almost invariably to do this in such a position as to face their observers squarely. When these birds were approached they would scuttle away, either dragging a wing or beating it on the sand as if it were broken. If the observer stopped, the birds would again squat as if on a nest. Upon being further pursued, they would again adopt the broke wing tactic until the water's edge was reached. Then they would fly off to join the circling birds overhead.

At the centre of the island we found many depressions resembling nests, some of these not more than two feet apart. These showed

no evidence of being more than scooped-out hollows, that is, there did not appear to be any deposition of specially gathered pebbles or other materials in their centers. Only a few of the nests contained eggs, but the structure of empty nests was the same as that of occupied ones. Three nests containing eggs were found. The clutch was two in each case. One egg, inadvertently broken, was within a few days of hatching. No nests with young were seen, but as young pratincoles are precocious this was not remarkable. A search was made for partly-grown fledglings hiding under refuse and debris on the island, but none was found. A few fully fledged birds were seen. These were browner than the adults and their feathers had narrow buffy edgings, giving them a scaled appearance similar to that of some species of young terns.

On June 3, I returned to the island alone. There had been a fairly heavy rain in the interim and the river had risen, causing a decrease in the size of the island. Fewer adult birds were about, but they still behaved like nesting individuals. One nest with two newly-hatched chicks was found. These were fluffy and protectively mottled. Despite its youth, one of them jumped out of my hand and attempted to run away.

By June 12, the monsoon had caused a sharp rise in the river and the island was completely inundated. Although I wandered along the west bank for several furlongs, thinking that the remaining young birds might have managed to find a sheltered stretch of shore, I could not see a single swallow plover of any age. The nesting success of the colony was therefore probably partially reduced by the onset of the monsoon. But I suspect that our discovery of the colony may have been late in its seasonal history, and that many young may have been fledged before that time. Major Phythian-Adams's April egg date would support such a view. An effort will be made to test this impression next year, provided similar islands reappear in the Hemavati and swallow plovers return to Sakleshpur.

3, ST. MARKS ROAD,
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12. OCCURRENCE OF THE PHEASANT-TAILED JAÇANA [*HYDROPHASIANUS CHIRURGUS* (SCOPOLI)] IN MADRAS

Mr. J. M. Forrow of Simson & McConechy Ltd., Madras, has sent us a sketch and description of a bird which is undoubtedly the Pheasant-tailed Jaçana in breeding plumage, which he observed on the banks of the Adyar river near Madras on the 25th June 1951.

Whistler in the 'Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats' states that there is no information about the occurrence of this species in the Madras Presidency except for one skin in the Madras Museum and two others obtained by Wardlaw-Ramsay (one undated, and one 1876) in the British Museum.